

TASK FORCE HIGHLIGHTS

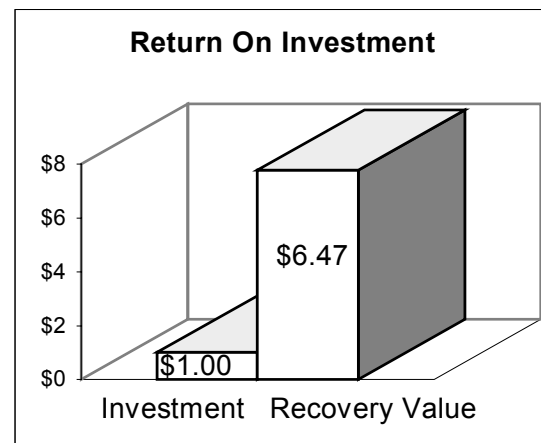
- ***“What a Coincidence:*** Hamtramck Team officers working a recent carjacking case found the victim’s vehicle occupied by two females and one male and arrested the three suspects. Officers received a phone call from the boyfriend of one of the females stating he had rented the vehicle from a friend and let his girlfriend use it. Officers asked him to come in the next morning to give a written statement. The victim was contacted and agreed to come in also. The next morning, both the boyfriend and the victim arrived at the police station about the same time. While sitting on the same bench, the victim recognized the boyfriend as one of the carjackers, and the boyfriend was quickly arrested.
- ***“Two Can Play the Game”*** A Grand Rapids team detective investigated the reported theft of a 1998 Hyundai from a local mall. He was suspicious of the claim and talked to the victim. The victim stuck to his story and stated that he still had all 3 sets of keys. The detective then said that the case would be solved when the car is recovered because only 2 people in the area know how to start the car without the keys. He told the victim in detail how the car could only be hot-wired to specific colored wires, and he would know who stole it if that is the kind of damage to the steering column. The victim left amazed with the detective’s efficiency. Later that day, the car was recovered near the victim’s home with the exact damage described by the detective. The victim was called in again to wrap up the case. When told that the only 2 people who knew how to steal that car were the detective and the victim since the detective made up the whole story, the victim finally confessed. He had crashed the car and was attempting to cover it for insurance purposes. He was charged with felony false report.
- ***“Quick Return on Investment”*** The ATPA funded a special training grant in which vehicle identification specialists were trained to be experts in their respective regions. Their expertise then serves as a resource for area police departments. An MSP trooper, who had just completed the training course 45 minutes earlier, was on his way home to northern Michigan. He

stopped at a store for a soda before continuing on and noticed a skid-steer loader parked near the store. Wanting to test his newly gained knowledge, he checked for the PIN tag. After finding the tag, he ran the numbers through LEIN/NCIC with the help of the local MSP Post. It was discovered that the Bobcat had been stolen from Illinois 11 years earlier!

- ***“North and South of the Border”*** Detroit Commercial Auto Theft Team officers assisted the FBI, U.S. Customs, and Canadian officers in arresting 51 subjects who had been stealing expensive vehicles in Toronto and retagging them in Windsor. They were sophisticated enough to computer generate fraudulent titles and ownership documents prior to bringing them into Detroit. The luxury vehicles were parked in hotel or casino garages where they would not draw attention until the ring could obtain fraudulent Michigan titles. Once a Michigan title was issued, the subjects sold the vehicles throughout the U.S. and South American countries. Approximately 180 vehicles with an estimated value of \$85 million were recovered. The ringleader, Mohamed Sahlia, was arrested in Panama.

Return on Investment

During 2001, ATPA grantees achieved the following: 3,621 recovery incidents; 3,348 arrests; and nearly 3,000 vehicles etched. The law enforcement grantees recovered \$6.47 for every \$1 the ATPA invested.



TASK FORCE HIGHLIGHTS, Continued

The ATPA has historically committed a large portion of its funds to support law enforcement consortiums. The following table displays the performance of these special auto theft units.

YEAR	ARRESTS	\$ VALUE RECOVERED
1989	1,464	17,669,200
1990	2,011	17,063,700
1991	2,004	18,869,900
1992	2,193	18,558,600
1993	2,130	17,600,400
1994	2,114	16,396,200
1995	2,007	19,400,000
1996	2,662	24,965,100
1997	2,584	23,656,100
1998	2,423	26,560,315
1999	2,990	34,424,931
2000	3,336	40,472,663
2001	3,348	33,377,618
TOTALS	31,266	\$309,014,727

- “International Implications”** Southfield Team officers investigating a suspicious auto loan discovered the suspects currently had 7 vehicles titled in one name. All the vehicles had been titled on the same day and financed at 7 different banks as excellent vehicles. Officers found that all 7 vehicles had been “totaled” by insurance companies and sold at auction to the suspects’ dealership on clean titles. After financing the vehicles for full value, the suspect would report them stolen and get insurance companies to pay off the loans. Documents seized from the suspects indicated they had been conducting this scam since 1980, and some of the fraudulent money was being sent to a bank in the Middle East. Officers arrested the suspects at the bank where they attempted to finance another vehicle, and they were able to seize over \$600,000 from the suspects’ accounts. They are also attempting to confiscate several expensive properties.
- “Surprise, Surprise”** Macomb County Auto Theft (MATS) officers arrested 3 subjects who were using false/stolen identities to obtain credit for high-priced SUV’s. A Secretary of State employee was apparently assisting them with various personal data and was fired. The subjects

were using the stolen identification to obtain credit from an on-line bank. The bank would approve the loan on-line and send a check to the subject’s bogus P.O. box. Working with the FBI and U.S. Postal Inspectors, MATS officers set up surveillance on a dealership where the subjects were going to take delivery of a \$50,000 GMC Yukon. One subject was dropped off at the dealership by an accomplice who was arrested down the road in a retagged vehicle. At the dealership, the subject presented his fraudulently obtained check, took delivery of the truck, and was immediately arrested. These subjects had obtained 4 other expensive vehicles in this manner. Officers recovered them all.

- “Speedy Work”** Oakland County officers interviewed a subject who had been arrested in a retagged Mustang at 2 a.m. The subject was advised of HEAT tip rewards for information leading to the arrest of car thieves, and he provided knowledge about a chop shop in Oak Park. Officers flew over the area to confirm the subject’s facts, and the ATPA funded prosecutor issued a search warrant for the location based on what they saw during the flight. By 4 p.m. that day, officers had arrested 3 subjects, recovered 3 Mustangs that had been rebuilt with stolen parts, and recovered tens of thousands of dollars worth of Mustang parts. The downside is that there may be over 125 of these rebuilt Mustangs all over Oakland County. The chop shop had been buying junk Mustangs with good titles and then stealing other Mustangs to repair the junked ones.
- “One After Another”** A Saginaw Team officer, while investigating a wave of vehicles being stolen where the owners left them running, observed a stolen Buick Century. Before he could get turned around to recover it, the officer saw a subject run from the Buick to a Ford pickup and drive down a sidewalk at high speed. In pursuit of the stolen pickup, the officer had a flat tire. While getting it changed, he observed a stolen Chevrolet go by (the suspects even honked their horn at him!). The officer advised dispatch, and the Chevrolet was later found unoccupied. The officer then heard over the radio that the Ford pickup he was looking for had been in a hit & run

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accident. He went to the scene to recover the unoccupied vehicle. After impounding the Buick, Ford, and Chevy, the officer headed back to the office but found another stolen Chevy parked 3 blocks away. Back on the road, the officer observed an occupied stolen Cadillac and got help stopping the vehicle. Finally an arrest!

- ***“All in a Day’s Work”*** A GAIN Team officer was sitting in a church parking lot on surveillance of a stolen vehicle parked on the street. The officer observed another vehicle drive past the stolen vehicle and stop. Three occupants of that vehicle got out and started shooting at another vehicle that was approaching the scene. After the target vehicle passed by (being shot at as it continued down the street), the shooters jumped back into their vehicle and sped after them. The GAIN officer chased and caught the shooters: three high school students whose car had been damaged by the subjects they were shooting at. No one was hurt, and the GAIN officer was happy to just go back to recovering the unoccupied stolen vehicle.
- ***“Retag Specialists”*** The Southwest Michigan (SCAR) Unit uncovered a sophisticated interstate theft and retag scheme that operated between Michigan, Indiana, and Illinois. The ringleaders maintained a store front in South Bend, Indiana that specialized in Jeeps and Neons. They would retag the stolen vehicles and often remove confidential numbers, making the vehicle identification difficult. The vehicles were then sold at auctions in the various states. Part of the MO was to steal vehicles from dealerships on return trips from the auctions, alter the vehicle identifiers, and sell the vehicles in states other than from where they were stolen. Advanced “black light” techniques from the crime lab were used to obtain vehicle identifications. Seven vehicles were recovered in Michigan with a value of \$121,000. Nine stolen vehicles and parts worth \$186,000 were recovered in adjoining states. Evidence indicates that the subjects were responsible for the thefts of over 75 vehicles during a two-year span, and most of the vehicles were sold to innocent purchasers. Federal indictments are pending.

- ***“Only in America”*** Western Wayne officers were “tipped” that an identity fraud ring was operating out of a house in Detroit. After surveillance of that location, officers obtained a search warrant and seized numerous computers, scanners, and copiers that were being used to produce fake driver’s licenses and Western Union checks. While MSP was analyzing the evidence, Detroit Police conducted another search of the same residence. They found the subjects had purchased new equipment to manufacture the same types of false documents! When the subjects were interviewed by a local TV station, they complained that MSP did not return their equipment so they could continue their criminal activity!
- ***“Who’s on First?”*** The Downriver Team investigated the reported theft of a 1995 Firebird. The owner originally reported it stolen in Dearborn in April 1998 and settled his claim with the insurance company. In June ’98, his roommate reported that his 1994 Firebird was stolen in another city and made an insurance claim with a different company. The 1994 Firebird was recovered in Indiana with a ’94 VIN plate in the dash. However, upon further investigation, this Firebird was identified as the 1995 Firebird stolen in April ’98. The person in Indiana had purchased the car from a Michigan man while working in the state. He was introduced to the seller, later identified as the owner of the 1994 Firebird, by the owner of the 1995 Firebird. After two insurance claims and a “cash sale”, the original fraud vehicle was finally recovered. Both the original owner and his roommate face a multitude of felony charges.

Vehicle Theft Rates

From 1986 to 2000, both Michigan’s population and registered vehicle fleet have grown 9% and 23% respectively. Despite these factors, Michigan’s theft rate per 100,000 population and per 100,000 registered vehicles has fallen dramatically.

THEFT RATE	1986	2000	% CHANGE
Population	787.5	542.3	-31.14%
Vehicles	999.5	609.5	-39.02%